

NORTHAMPTON HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Minutes of July 19, 2023 Meeting

Present: Commissioners Alton McCray, Angela D'Souza, Chelsea Kline, and Dianna Stallone

The meeting was called to order at 6:05 pm.

The members of the Commission expressed that they were pleased to be meeting in person for the first time since Covid.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Minutes

The minutes of the June 2023 meeting were approved via motion by Commissioner McCray and seconded by Commissioner D'Souza. Commissioner Kline abstained.

Update on the Working Group for Equity in Community Gardens

Commissioner D'Souza gave an update about the progress on the working group for equity in the Community Gardens. She indicated that she had met with Robin (the person currently heading the group) and expressed willingness of the HRC to support the group. Robin advised that she is stepping away from the group due to her other commitments. The monthly meetings for the next few months have already been set and distributed to the group. The last meeting was cancelled due to smoke and a zoom meeting followed. Commissioner D'Souza was unable to attend the rescheduled meeting due to a conflict, but she did speak with Robin. Commissioner D'Souza indicated that she would share information with the Human Rights Commission. The working group is looking for members, even if the person does not have a plot in the community garden. Commissioner D'Souza was planning to reach out to someone she thought was knowledgeable who might be willing to assist the working group.

Commissioner D'Souza also followed up with Robin on a question posed at the June meeting of the HRC about whether the equity and inclusion banners that were made for the Northampton Community gardens could be shared with the Florence Community gardeners. Robin indicated the signs could be shared, but without the QR codes because those codes lead to the webpage of the Northampton Working Group. Robin brought up the fact that blueprints from across the country could be

used for ideas that seemed to help with diversity, equity, and inclusion in the community garden setting. Commissioner D'Souza will continue to keep us updated.

Update on Committee to Study Racialized Harms

Commissioner McCray shared an update about the Committee to Study Racialized Harms. He advised that the committee members had been chosen. There were initially thirty applicants for the eleven available positions. After the time commitments and expectations were discussed, the applicant pool shrunk to twenty applicants. The goal was to achieve nine to eleven committee members. Eleven were chosen. Of the eleven, eight members were African American and three were non-African American.

Commissioner McCray indicated that the process was moving slowly-although the Committee was hoping to meet by the end of the month. Formal leadership of the Committee had not been chosen, but Marissa Elkins and Garrick Perry (two authors of the resolution) would direct the Committee as an initial matter. The names of the members of the Committee were announced at the last City Council meeting. The Committee is expected to work for approximately eighteen months, at which point they will produce a report. Thus, the original anticipated completion date was to be in November of 2024. However, given the late start, these expectations may realistically be pushed out further, perhaps into early 2025. Commissioner McCray will continue to keep us updated on the progress.

Membership Issues, Direction, and Goals for the HRC

There was discussion about the dwindling membership of the HRC, and the unsuccessful efforts at recruiting new members. Commissioner McCray suggested that some of the people who had applied to be on the Committee to Study Racialized Harms might be good candidates to consider, since they had expressed an interest in human rights issues and a willingness to serve. Commissioner McCray said he would explore that as a possibility, although it was not clear as to the availability of the names and contact information for those members. It was also discussed that some members who were chosen to serve on that committee may also have an interest in serving on the HRC.

Commissioner Stallone indicated that she had spoken with several individuals and had encouraged them to apply. She also reached out to individuals who did not live in Northampton, but who had people in their circle of friends who might live in

Northampton who might make good Commissioners. Commissioner Stallone advised that she had spoken to the Mayor's assistant, Rachel, who indicated that she was not aware of anyone who had applied for membership on the Commission.

It was agreed that the Commission benefits greatly from having a diverse set of viewpoints and personal experience. Ideally, although there really aren't any set requirements to be a good Commissioner there should be a core commitment to human rights for all individuals.

There was discussion about how to make serving on the HRC more meaningful. It was acknowledged that the lack of resources and authority, together with an apparent indifference to the HRC and its voice within the city are mounting obstacles to recruiting new members and to keeping the existing membership on board. The commissioners agreed to think about what specific changes might help alleviate these barriers and to be prepared to discuss ideas at the next meeting.

Commissioner D'Souza suggested that we look at other similar commissions in other cities to see what models have been working elsewhere. There was general agreement with Commissioner Kline's suggestion that the commission needs to "work smarter, not harder" as all the individuals who make up the commission are already juggling numerous family and work obligations.

Commissioner D'Souza indicated that having a more unified sense of purpose would be helpful and that part of that purpose should be to educate ourselves on a regular basis about differing viewpoints and the rapidly changing developments in the field of Human Rights generally. Commissioner D'Souza pointed out the importance of language and the continuing evolution of linguistics that can either operate to include or exclude diverse experiences of marginalized communities.

Developments in Human Rights Cases

Commissioner Stallone moved to postpone discussion of the developments in the law to the next meeting due to time constraints. That motion was seconded and unanimously approved.

New Business

Commissioner Stallone advised that she had received an email from Keith Benoit from the Office of Planning and Sustainability requesting that a member of the HRC step up to take the place of former Commissioner Megan Paik on the Public

Services Advisory Committee. It was agreed that Commissioner Stallone would attend those meetings on behalf of the HRC.

Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting was set for Wednesday, August 16th at 6:00 p.m. with the meeting to be held in person at the City Council Chambers.

There being no further business before the Commission, Commissioner McCray moved to adjourn, Commissioner Kline seconded the motion and the adjournment was unanimously approved. The meeting was adjourned at 7:34 p.m.